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Chapter I

FROM HUNTING AND GATHERING TO AGRICULTURE

Hunting and Gathering

In Southeastern Asia today there are peoples of different cultural levels carrying on some of the major economies that man has developed in the course of time. The first people to invade the tropical forest regions around the South China Sea were alithic, or prepalaeolithic, food gatherers,[1] who obtained their food by collecting edible wild plants and by hunting and fishing. Today geographically separated peoples are still living in a prepalaeolithic or palaeolithic food-gathering and hunting stage.[2] In Southeastern Asia they are represented by the Semang of the Malay Peninsula, the Andaman Islanders, and the Aeta of the Philippines—all of whom are Negritos, or dwarfed Negroids—the Kubu of Sumatra, the Sakai of the Malay Peninsula, the Toala of Celebes,[3] and the Punan of Borneo.[4]

The degree to which collecting, hunting, or fishing contributes to the food supply varies with the season; it also varies with different peoples, depending upon the resources of the region, the type of equipment the people may possess, and the skills they may have acquired. Food-gathering and hunting peoples have a division of labor under which the men hunt while the women and children gather vegetable matter and catch insects and small animals. The men may lend a helping hand, however, in digging up some of the very deep-growing yams. Men will also participate in the picking of fruits, especially when it is necessary to climb tall trees. The food gatherers and hunters of Southeastern Asia are nomadic in the sense that they do not remain long in one place. However, they do not wander aimlessly through the jungle. Each group has its definite territory—among

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Note: The titles of the works here cited in footnotes have been abbreviated, whenever possible. The full titles may be found in the Bibliography, p. 269 ff.

1 Nippold (Rassen- und Kulturgeschichte der Negrito-Völker, 1936, pp. 253–255 and 398–400) considers the alithic wood culture of the Negritos of Southeastern Asia to be older than palaeolithic culture. These people use wood rather than stone as raw material for their tools. Because of the perishable nature of wood, archaeologists and prehistorians have not yet been able, so far as I know, to go farther back than the palaeolithic age and therefore have not been able to confirm the hypothesis of an alithic age. Menghin (Weltgeschichte der Steinzeit, 1931, p. 91) believes that, from an archaeological point of view, an alithic wood culture may be regarded only as a possibility, but Kern (Die Anfänge der Weltgeschichte, 1933, p. 35), who compared pygmy culture with palaeolithic cultures, comes to the conclusion that alithic wood cultures probably preceded palaeolithic culture.

2 By divesting the word "palaeolithic" of its specific chronological connotation the term may be used for present-day peoples who have a food-gathering and hunting culture.

3 The racial affinities of the Kubu, the Sakai, and the Toala are not clear, by some they are called Veddoids, by others, Australoids.

4 They are considered to be Proto-Malays.

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During untold centuries in which they collected plant matter, women acquired an intimate knowledge of vegetable life. Eduard Hahn and others have therefore reasoned that women were the inventors of the cultivation of plants and hence were the first food producers. Hahn has given the name *Hackbau* (hoe culture or hoe tillage) to primitive cultivation, and maintains that the hoe is woman's implement; he draws a sharp distinction between Hackbau and more advanced cultivation, which he calls *Pflugbau* (plow culture or plow tillage) and ascribes to men.[9] It is indeed true that men generally farm with plows and that many examples may be cited of women using hoes; nevertheless, there are so many instances of male primitive cultivators employing hoes or similar instruments that Hahn's classification should be modified. While there seems to be no reason for abandoning his theory of the invention of plant cultivation by women, the classification of cultivation by tools, such as the hoe and the plow, ascribed to one sex or the other, is unsatisfactory. For, in spite of the fact that the collection of vegetable matter is almost exclusively the woman's task in the gathering economy, among primitive cultivators men either assist women in the cultivation of plants or entirely take over this activity whenever hunting or fishing become less important than soil tillage. Furthermore, many primitive cultivators do not use the hoe, but continue to employ the digging stick, characteristically used by the food-gathering women. From Formosa southward throughout the Malay Archipelago, as well as on the mainland of Southeastern Asia, the digging stick, also known as the dibble stick or planting stick, is frequently used by the primitive cultivator. On the other hand, there are advanced cultivators who till their land intensively with hoes; they use manure, rotate their crops, terrace fields that lie on slopes, and practice irrigation, yet they do not use plows drawn by draft animals (however, in some instances they have livestock). In other words, advanced agriculture does not depend upon the animal-drawn plow nor does primitive agriculture depend upon the hoe.

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A more fundamental distinction between primitive and advanced agriculture may be made in terms of land use rather than of tools. Primitive cultivators, with the possible exception of those living in arid regions, raise one or two crops on a given plot of land, then abandon the plot and make a new field, preferably in the forest, so that the old plot lies fallow sometimes for many years and may itself revert to forest; in short, primitive cultivators shift the place of their agricultural activities with regularity. The crop land consists of small patches scattered throughout the forest; these patches are extremely ragged in appearance and do not look at all like fields. A primitive cultivator would never think of removing stumps and fallen trees; instead, he deliberately raises his crop among them. This kind of cultivation is best described as shifting-field, or shift-

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[9] Hahn: Das Alter der wirtschaftlichen Kultur, 1905; idem: Die Entstehung der Pflugkultur, 1909; idem: Von der Hacke zum Pflug, 1914; Kolff: "Hahn's hypothese," 1926, pp. 884–907.

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[See pp. 35ff., category 241 or 116. -- Analyst]

Chapter II

THE SHIFTING CULTIVATOR [p. 16]

241 The field of the shifting cultivator is known by various local terms. It is
361 called *caiñgin* in the Philippines, *humah* in Java, *ladang* in the Indies as a
311 whole and in Malaya, *taungya* in Burma, *tamrai* in Thailand, and *rây* in Indochina.[1] Practically without exception, it is a clearing in either primeval or second-growth forest. The use of grassland is so unusual that we shall limit the following discussion to shifting cultivation on forest land.

As his name indicates, the shifting cultivator does not use the same piece of land every year; instead, he kills or cuts down at regular intervals —every year, every other year, or every third year—the trees of a small forest patch. He burns as much of the woody growth as is possible or convenient. Among the charred stumps and half-burned tree trunks he plants his favorite crops, be they cereals such as millet, upland rice, or maize; or tubers such as yams or sweet potatoes (Figs. 4–10). The latter
[243 are planted extensively by the *caiñgero*, the shifting cultivator in the Phil-
462] ippines. In planting cereals it is usually the men who take the planting
134] stick to make little holes and the women who drop in a few seeds, using their feet to cover the seed with soil (Figs. 11–13). As forest land is generally free from weeds or grasses and the soil is usually rich in humus and well supplied with the ash of burned plant matter after clearing, it produces a very good, or even excellent, first harvest; the second harvest begins to show a decline in yield, and thereafter the returns diminish rapidly.[2] Grasses and weeds invade the clearing. Rather than battle these, the peasant abandons his old ladang and cuts and burns a new patch of forest (Fig. 15). The old plot reverts, under favorable conditions, to second-growth forest, the so-called *blukar* of the Malays, and is not cleared again for a period, the length of which may vary from 8 to 15 years, or more.

Shifting cultivation is characterized by a lack of tillage; the soil is hardly disturbed, as no plow turns it. There is less labor involved than in other methods of cultivation, and the work is more evenly spread over the year—an advantage where labor is relatively scarce. The tasks involved are cutting, burning, and planting; sometimes simple fencing of the field against animals, guarding—especially before the harvest and usually by women and children—and, finally, harvesting. In addition, there may be some weeding in the first year and certainly during the second.

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[1] In British India *jhum*, *kumri*, *dhya*, *bewar*, or *dullet*; in Ceylon *chena*; in Japan, Korea, and Formosa *kuren* (a Japanese term); in Central America *milpa*; in parts of Africa *chitemene*.

[2] Danhof reports for parts of the Lampoeng Districts that a ladang will produce from 15 to 25 quintals of rice in the first year and approximately 5 in the second year. In areas where the second yield shows such a serious decline the peasants usually prefer to make a new ladang—Danhof: "Bijdrage," 1940, p. 199.

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THE PEASANTRY OF SOUTH EAST ASIA [1]

PROFESSOR RAYMOND FIRTH, F.B.A.

IF it is not wholly true that the social and economic reconstruction which is so necessary in Asia today must begin with the peasant, it is certain that no programme which omits the peasant can be on firm foundations. The recent history of China is evidence enough for this. My concern, as a social anthropologist, is with the analysis and classification of social relations between people and groups of people, rather than with political or economic affairs as such, although inevitably I cannot disregard them. So my aim is to show briefly some of the most important aspects of the social organization of the South East Asian peasant communities, and of the values by which this organization works. Though the details in my paper refer mainly to Malaya and Indonesia, I think the generalizations have some value for the South East Asian region as a whole.

If the basic features of the peasant society are ignored, one can understand neither the peculiar tenacity which it still possesses in modern conditions, nor the reactions of its members to the increasing impact of external economic and political forces. The definition of a peasant is a countryman—a man engaged in rural pursuits, primarily agriculture, with a comparatively simple technology and a special interest in the land he works. In South East Asia one may extend the application of the term to cover the majority of fishermen and even village craftsmen too. They are of the same social class as the agriculturalists, and often members of the same families. As occupational groups, they may even be separable only in theory, since many a peasant farmer is also a fisherman or craftsman by turns, as his seasonal cycle or his cash-needs influence him. What R. H. Tawney has said of agriculture—that it is at once a craft, a business, and a manner of life—can be applied more widely here; the problems of all these peasants alike are partly technical, partly financial and commercial, and partly cultural and social.

It is difficult to say just what proportion of the present population of South East Asia may be classed as peasants. It would seem that in nearly every South East Asian country two-thirds or more of the total population is to be found in agricultural communities, tilling the soil. In 1930 the census of Java and Madura in Indonesia gave about 70 per cent of the male workers as dependent for their livelihood on native agricultural output, and about 75 per cent in the regions of Indonesia outside Java and Madura, while large numbers of women were engaged in home craft production. In Siam, in about 1930, almost 90 per cent of the population lived in agricultural communities, rice production providing the living of about 80 per

[1] Originally delivered at a meeting at Chatham House on 21 February 1950.

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cent of the population. Malaya, of course, is exceptional, because of the especially heavy concentration on the production of rubber and tin. According to the 1947 census of Malaya, about 34 per cent of the working population were classed as cultivators and fishermen working on their own account or as unpaid members of families. In all, I think one could reckon that rather more than 100 million people in South East Asia can be regarded as peasantry.

Throughout all this region, peasant technology is simple; skills, though traditionally well adapted to the job in hand, are of limited range. Soils, despite the richness of some of the swamps and river flood-plains, are generally of poor quality. The system of felling and burning the jungle, taking off crops for a few years, and then moving away to cultivate fresh clearings while the old ones revert to jungle, is still common in the mountain areas of Burma, Malaya, and Siam, in part of West Java, in much of Borneo, and in the outer islands of Indonesia. It is known as shifting cultivation or jungle-fallowing. Although regarded as extremely primitive, it is an economic use of land in areas of low population density, where plentiful land allows of long rotation of clearings and consequent restoration of soil fertility. But where population is dense, the system cannot provide the necessary volume of production without endangering the future soil capital, and that is one of the major problems of the area. In the more sedentary forms of agriculture, fertility is conserved with a great deal of care, by manuring, by water control, and so on. Sometimes there is very elaborate and spectacular terracing, as in parts of the Philippines or in Bali, where the native cultivator through his own efforts through generations has known how to make the best of the land with his available techniques. Yet many of these techniques are only of limited efficiency, and custom may be a barrier to improvement. For large masses of the Muslim peasantry of South East Asia, for instance, the pig, an excellent economic converter of resources, is taboo for religious reasons.

Productivity of the South East Asian peasant is apt to be low, whether considered in terms of the margins required above subsistence to give him and his family the range of goods and services they want, or by comparison with Western results. It is hard to make this last comparison significant because of the differing bases, but the following figures will give, perhaps rather superficially, some idea of the comparison. In terms of cwt. of cropping per acre, for instance, the rice crop of part of South East Asia can be compared roughly with the wheat crop of Western Europe. The figures are taken from different years, but they can be regarded as significant averages. Java at 12 cwt. of rice to the acre corresponds with France at 12 cwt. of wheat to the acre; Siam at 14 cwt. to the acre with the United Kingdom at 18 cwt. and Germany at a little less; Japan at 27 cwt. of rice per acre corresponds to Denmark with 27 cwt. of wheat per acre. Yet rice is supposed to be a crop of much higher yield. What is more significant is that productivity per acre in both Malaya and Indo-China is only 10 cwt. on the average, or only between one-third and one-half of the average in Japan.